

BACKGROUND

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can affect people who have experienced life-threatening events, such as combat, a terrorist attack, or a personal assault. Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, depression and social withdrawal, as well as physical health changes. Treatment often includes cognitive-behavioral therapy, with safe, controlled imagining of the trauma.

WHAT VA IS DOING

Areas of focus for VA research on PTSD include evaluations of treatments involving medication or specialized group therapy, and studies of neurological factors that may underlie the condition.

Highlights of current or recent research include the following:

- **New PTSD program in Puget Sound**—A newly formed team of clinicians and investigators will be studying the symptoms and characteristics of patients with PTSD who also abuse drugs; studying animal models of the condition to identify which circuits and chemicals in the brain are involved; and evaluating World War II veterans with the condition to identify brain changes associated with long-term PTSD.

- **PTSD in women**—Nearly 400 women veterans are taking part in a multisite study comparing two treatments: prolonged-exposure therapy, which includes education and exposure to memories of the trauma; and present-centered therapy, which focuses on providing emotional support. Both treatments are designed to boost patients' overall mental health and functioning.

- **Imaging studies show brain changes**—A team of VA and Yale investigators has used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and positron emission tomography (PET) to document changes in brain chemistry and structure associated with PTSD, yielding important clues toward the development of new treatments.

For more information on VA research:

Web: www.va.gov/resdev

Tel: (410) 962-1800, ext. 223

